What Is The Malthusian Trap?

The Malthusian Trap addresses the overpopulation of the planet.

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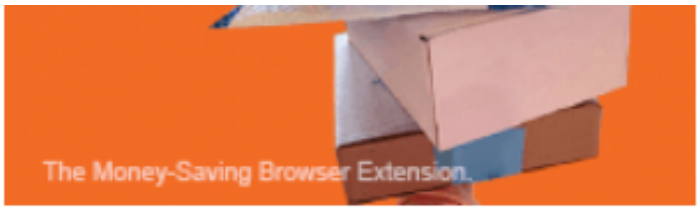

The concept of the Malthusian Trap was proposed by Thomas Robert Malthus in 1798. The Malthusian Trap or Malthusian Theory argues that gains in food production lead to an increase in population, which results in food shortages as the ever growing population takes over land meant more crop production.

Who Was Malthus?

Thomas Robert Malthus was an English clergyman, economist, and historian born in 1766 in Guildford, Surrey, United Kingdom. He studied at the Jesus College at Cambridge University, and later became a political economist and history professor in 1805 at the East India Company's College at Hertfordshire, until his death. That made Malthus the first holder of such academic office. In 1819, he got elected as a fellow of the Royal Society (an independent scientific academy), and two years later became a member of the Political Economic Club founded in 1921 by James Mill. In 1824 Malthus got elected as one of the 10 royal associates of the Royal Society of Literature. He also co-founded the Statistical Society of London in 1834, the year which he died. Malthus also authored several essays like 'An Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent' in 1815, and 'Principles of Political Economy' in 1820. But his most famous essay was in 1798 titled 'An Essay on the Principle of Population' widely known as the Malthusian Trap or Theory.

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The Malthusian Trap/Theory

The Malthusian Trap argues that as population increases, the world wouldn't be able to sustain crop production to feed the ever-growing population. Malthus' argument was based on the theory that populations grow in a way that overtakes the development of adequate land for crops. The Malthusian Trap also states that income gains per person through advancing technologies are lost through increased growth in population. As a result, the Malthusian Trap Foundation addresses sustainability problems likely to happen as population increases, dubbed the Sustainability Trap. In the Malthusian Trap, Malthus also observed that the increase in population is first triggered by gains in food production. However, as the population rises it exceeds the limit where food production can support the entire population, resulting in food shortages. According to Malthus, after the population increase exceeds food supplies, the result is a crisis. This crisis is termed as the Malthusian crisis where famine, diseases and low resistance to disease occur which halt the population growth.

Background

While living in 19th century England, Malthus witnessed the decline of living standards as birth rates rose among the poor. As a result, he advocated for birth rate regulation to ensure poor families never gave birth to children they couldn't support. He also cited irresponsibility in the lower class society as the cause of their poverty. Malthus also argued for people to marry at a later age when they are able to adequately provide for their families. Malthus cited this delay as a moral restraint according to American Association of Geographers.

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Legacy And Criticism

Economists and sociologists have criticized Malthus as a pessimist who never considered humans could adapt and overcome resource scarcity even amidst population growth. They argue Malthus didn't foresee advances in technology could help increase food production even in small land pieces. Famous American sociologist William Catton Junior noted that Malthus may have argued against population growth because he could not foresee technology advances making economic systems to overshoot their production ability.

In the 20th century, environmentalists influenced by Malthus' Theory pointed that the Earth could not sustain a large human population. That means there is need for population growth to be brought under control. This viewpoint has spawned the neo-Malthusian theory espoused by famed people like Paul Ralph Ehrlich, a renowned biologist, who authored 'The Population Bomb' book, a best-seller warning against overpopulation.

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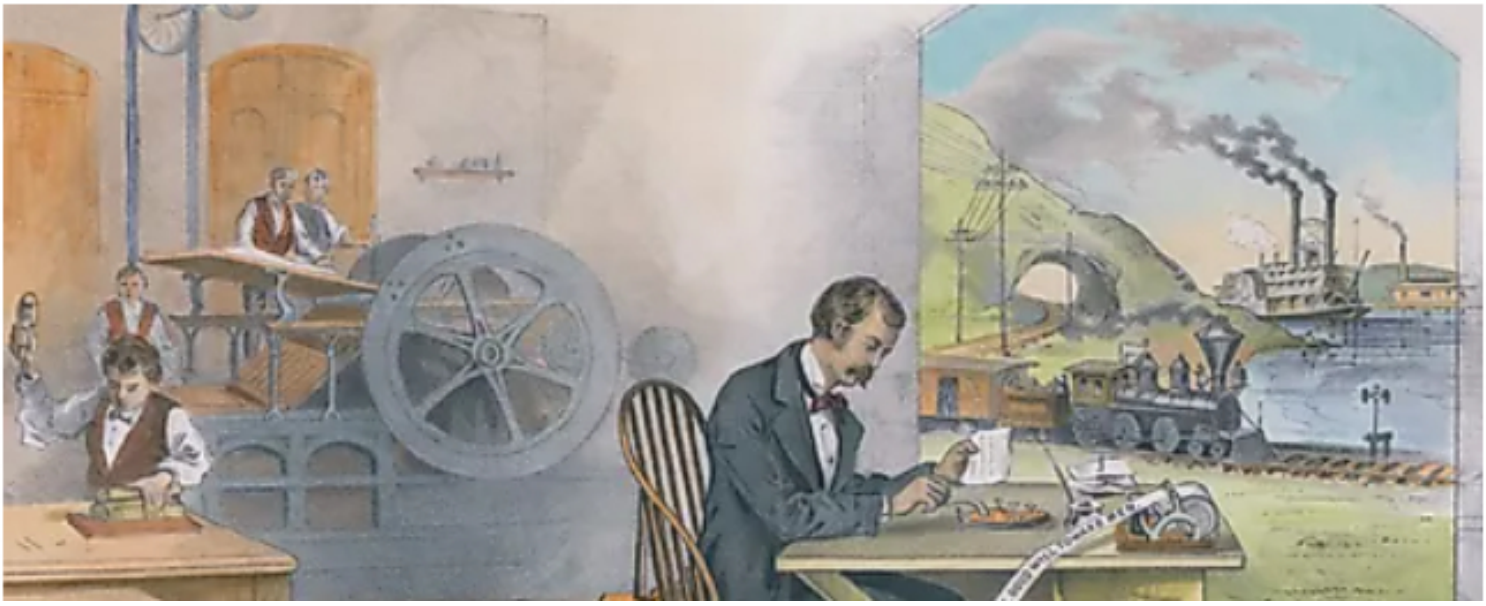

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